CHAPTER 23:
KABUKI LOVE (PART 3)

HI

DIP

SLAM

ART BY ICHIHA AKIZUKI
WRITTEN BY MAI MOCHIZUKI
CHARACTER DESIGNS BY
SHIZU YAMAUCHI

AAH!

AAH!

AAAA!!

AH...

MURMUR

MURMUR

MURMUR

MURMUR

HOLMES-SAN...

LET'S GO.

I DON'T THINK THAT WAS AN ACCIDENT.

O-OF COURSE.

I'LL EXPLAIN LATER.

WAIT! WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

REI-SAN, PEOPLE HERE KNOW YOU.

COULD YOU GET US INTO THE GREEN-ROOM?

HOLMES
!

I'M FINE! I SWEAR!

I'LL GO TO THE HOSPITAL LATER!

JUST BIND IT UP FOR NOW!

LET ME DO MY ANNOUNCE-MENT TONIGHT!

LET ME...

PARDON ME.

YOU CAN'T JUST COME BARGING IN HERE!

WH-WHO ARE YOU PEOPLE?

SEIJI-SAN'S GRANDSON?

THIS IS YAGASHIRA KIYOTAKA-SAN, A FRIEND OF MINE.

HE'S YAGA-SHIRA SEIJI'S GRAND-SON.

NGH...

IT DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE BROKEN.

DO YOU HAVE ANY MEDICAL TRAINING?

NO.

BUT I PRACTICE MARTIAL ARTS, SO I KNOW FIRST AID.

R-RIGHT!

SOMEONE BRING AN ICE PACK!

KISUKE-SAN!

HIS FIANCÉE ... OF COURSE SHE'D BE WORRIED ABOUT HIM.

I'M JUST FINE.

I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE SAFE!

SO PLEASE! JUST LET ME DO MY ANNOUNCE-MENT!

KIYOTAKA-SAN IS RIGHT. MY ANKLE ISN'T BROKEN.

MASTER!

ANOTHER "ACCIDENT" WILL HAPPEN IF YOU DO.

...

YOU KNOW THAT, DON'T YOU?

WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, HOLMES?

ABSOLUTELY NOT, KISUKE-SAN.

IS THAT ALL RIGHT, KISUKE-SAN?

GIVEN THE SITUATION,

I FEEL I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO EXPLAIN.

KISUKE-SAN RECENTLY RECEIVED A THREATENING LETTER.

A THREAT-ENING LETTER ?!

THE THREAT-ENING LETTER READ...

HE CAME TO SEE ME BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE TO ASK FOR MY ADVICE.

"YOUR TAKING OF THE NAME ICHIKATA KISUKE IS UNACCEPT-ABLE.

REFUSE THE SUCCES-SION."

"YOUR ONSTAGE ANNOUNCE-MENT WILL BE STOPPED."

YOUR TAKING OF THE NAME ICHIKATA KISUKE IS UNACCEPTABLE. REFUSE THE SUCCESSION. YOUR ONSTAGE ANNOUNCEMENT WILL BE STOPPED.

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THEY'RE CERTAINLY MAKING GOOD ON THE THREAT.

SO IF YOU GO ON WITH YOUR PERFORMANCE, KISUKE-SAN, I'M AFRAID IT WILL ONLY CONTINUE.

IT SAID THE ANNOUNCEMENT WOULD BE STOPPED?

THEN DO YOU THINK WHOEVER WROTE THAT CAUSED THE ACCIDENT?

YOU'RE WRONG!

THIS WAS JUST AN ACCIDENT ...

...

ESCALATING THE SITUATION WON'T BENEFIT THE CULPRIT EITHER.

KISUKE-SAN.

KISUKE-SAN RECEIVED THE LETTER ON A DAY THE THEATER WASN'T OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, AND SAID LETTER WAS PLASTERED ALL OVER THIS GREENROOM.

IT'S POSSIBLE IT WAS JUST A MEAN-SPIRITED PRANK.

LOOK, IF WE'RE BEING HONEST... THREATENING LETTERS ARE COMMONPLACE IN OUR LINE OF WORK.

WHICH MEANS...

IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE WORK OF SOMEONE VERY CLOSE TO KISUKE-SAN.

...YOU'RE SAYING IT WAS ME?

If we're really being honest here...

IF STOPPING THE ANNOUNCE-MENT WAS THE GOAL,

WE KNOW WHO'S REALLY BEHIND IT, RIGHT?

I DON'T THINK HE'S MORE TALENTED THAN I AM BY ANY MEANS.

IT'S TRUE I'M ANGRY THAT MY LITTLE BROTHER WAS CHOSEN FOR THE "KISUKE" NAME.

EVEN I KNOW THAT MUCH!

IN THE ENTERTAIN-MENT WORLD, POPULARITY IS A FACET OF TALENT!

BUT HE HAS NAME RECOGNITION, AND PEOPLE LIKE HIM!

THE THREATENING LETTER WASN'T SENT AFTER KISUKE-SAN'S SUCCESSION ANNOUNCE-MENT...

BUT RATHER AFTER HIS ENGAGEMENT ANNOUNCE-MENT.

IN OTHER WORDS, KISUKE-SAN'S ENGAGEMENT IS WHAT TRIGGERED THE THREAT.

BROTHER...

INDEED.

I NEVER CONSIDERED YOU A SUSPECT, MATSUNOSUKE-SAN.

GLANCE

YOU MEAN...

IT WAS SOMEONE WHO HOLDS A GRUDGE OVER KISUKE-SAN'S ENGAGE-MENT?

HEY NOW! IT WASN'T ME, OKAY?

BESIDES, EVEN IF SHE'S IN SHOWBIZ TOO,

THAT DOESN'T MEAN SHE HAS FREE ACCESS TO THE GREEN-ROOMS.

SOMEONE WOULD'VE SEEN HER COME AND GO.

I'LL ADMIT THE SUDDEN ANNOUNCE-MENT IRKED ME,

BUT I WOULD NEVER DO ANYTHING THAT NASTY!

AND THE SAME GOES FOR REI-SAN, TOO.

THAT'S TRUE...

I FEEL LIKE THERE'S MORE THAN JUST ANGER BEHIND IT.

STILL, THE WAY THE LETTER WAS WRITTEN...

IN OTHER WORDS, NO ONE WHO RESENTS THE ENGAGEMENT COULD HAVE DONE IT.

BUT NO ONE WHO RESENTS THE SUCCESSION WOULD'VE WAITED UNTIL THE ENGAGE-MENT...

THERE'S A SENSE OF BETRAYAL TOO, YOU KNOW?

THAT'S NOT JUST RESENTMENT OR ANGER.

IT JUST SAID HIM TAKING IT WAS UNACCEPTABLE, RIGHT?

WELL, IT DIDN'T SAY HE DIDN'T DESERVE THE NAME OR ANYTHING.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

NICE! DID I SAY SOMETHING SMART FOR ONCE?!

IMPRESSIVE, AKIHITO-SAN. YOU TRULY ARE A MAN OF EMOTION.

I HEARD THAT YOU PUSHED HARD FOR HIM TO BE THE NEXT KISUKE.

WHAT WAS IT THAT INSPIRED YOU?

INCIDENTALLY, TOZABURO-SAN... I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A QUESTION.

YOU THINK THAT'S CONNECTED TO THE THREAT?

HUMOR ME.

...HE HAS THAT SPECIAL SOMETHING. AS AN ACTOR.

IT'S A KIND OF GENIUS, IN A WAY.

BUT THAT "IT FACTOR" IS SOMETHING YOU'RE EITHER BORN WITH OR YOU'RE NOT.

SKILL IS SOMETHING THAT CAN BE TRAINED THROUGH HARD WORK,

DID SHE BELIEVE HE WAS MORE SUITED TO THE KISUKE NAME THAN MATSUNO-SUKE-SAN?

SO...

DID YOUR WIFE PUSH FOR HIM AS WELL?

BUT SHE MAY BELIEVE OTHERWISE.

SHE DID SAY THAT, BUT WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

I DON'T CHOOSE THE KISUKE SUCCESSOR ALONE.

SHE MIGHT THINK HE EARNED THE KISUKE NAME THROUGH HER SUPPORT.

AND I WOULDN'T MAKE MY DECISION BASED ON HERS.

WHAT ARE YOU—

WAIT A MINUTE, HOLMES-SAN.

THERE DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE ANYONE WITH BOTH THE MOTIVE AND THE MEANS TO HAVE DONE THIS.

AS WE DISCUSSED EARLIER,

HOWEVER, THERE IS ONE PERSON WHO KNOWS THE THEATER AND COULD COME AND GO FREELY HERE.

SOMEONE WHO WOULD FEEL THAT KISUKE-SAN'S ENGAGE-MENT...

...MAKES HIS TAKING OF THE KISUKE NAME "UNACCEP-TABLE."

AND THE PERSON WHO MEETS ALL THOSE CRITERIA...

MA'AM...

ARE YOU THE ONE WHO SENT THE THREATENING LETTER AND SABOTAGED THE STUNT RIGGING?

WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!

MY WIFE WOULD NEVER-

KISUKE-SAN.

YOU HAD AN AFFAIR WITH TOZABURO-SAN'S WIFE TOO, DIDN'T YOU?

...

UM...

WHAT ?!

He's not denying it?!

BUT EVEN SO,

SHE MUST HAVE KNOWN THAT KISUKE-SAN WOULD MARRY EVENTUALLY.

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TOZABURO-SAN'S WIFE BELIEVES KISUKE-SAN OWES HIS NAME TO HER,

WHICH MADE HIS ENGAGEMENT FEEL LIKE A BETRAYAL.

AS AKIHITO-SAN POINTED OUT BEFORE,

THE THREATENING LETTER WAS CONDEMNING IN NATURE.

"KISUKE-SAN JUST GAVE IN TO YOUR RELENTLESS ADVANCES!"

"HE WAS ONLY USING YOU TO FURTHER HIS CAREER! HE THOUGHT IT WAS GROSS THAT YOU TOOK HIM SERIOUSLY!"

I IMAGINE THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE...

...THAT TRIGGERED SUCH DRASTIC MEASURES, YES?

SHE TOLD ME...

THAT WOMAN TOLD ME!

AND I DIDN'T CARE!

I KNEW THAT KISUKE ONLY GOT CLOSE TO ME FOR THE SAKE OF HIS CAREER!

AYAME...

YOU THINK I'D LET YOU GET AWAY WITH IT ?!

AND TO TELL THAT TO YOUR FIANCÉE ?!

BUT... TO FIND ME GROSS ?!

KISUKE-KUN MAY BE A PLAYBOY, BUT HE NEVER BADMOUTHS HIS LOVERS!

THERE'S NO WAY HE SAID THAT!

W-WAIT A MINUTE!

BUT IT'S TRUE NEVER-THELESS!

IT'S DISGUSTING TO SEE OLD HAGS LIKE YOU GET DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR!

I'VE KNOWN ABOUT YOU FOR A LONG TIME!

SHE'S RIGHT.

KISUKE-SAN NEVER ACTUALLY SAID ANY OF THAT...

YOU...
YOU LITTLE BRAT!

GET LOST, HAG!

HOLD ON, YOU TWO!

IT... IT'S NOT TRUE!

I KNEW THAT IT WAS WRONG,

BUT I COULDN'T STOP MYSELF FROM FALLING HEAD OVER HEELS.

I ONLY...

I ONLY STARTED A RELATION-SHIP WITH AYAME-SAN...

...BECAUSE I WAS ATTRACTED TO HER!

KISUKE-SAN...

I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD LEAD TO THIS...

I RUSHED INTO AN ENGAGEMENT HOPING THAT WOULD END THINGS.

BUT WHEN I REALIZED THAT AYAME-SAN COULDN'T STOP HERSELF EITHER,

HONES-TLY!

I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT MY OWN CLUMSI-NESS...

...WOULD CAUSE ALL THIS CHAOS.

I'M SO, SO SORRY!

LOOK AT ME.

YOU...

ABSO-LUTE FOOL!

YOU ...

SLAP

WRAP YOUR ANKLE UP AND GO DELIVER A SPECTACULAR ANNOUNCE-MENT!

DEDICATE YOURSELF TO KABUKI FROM NOW ON!

YES, SIR!

DEAR...

LET'S GO, AYAME.

IT DOESN'T CHANGE THE FACT THAT YOU'RE THE LOVE OF MY LIFE.

AND...

YOU ARE MY WIFE.

EVERYTHING YOU DO IS MY RESPONSI-BILITY.

DEAR...

UGH.

I'M NOT SPENDING THE REST OF MY LIFE WITH A MAN LIKE YOU.

IT'S ONE THING TO HAVE AN AFFAIR FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR CAREER, BUT YOU ACTUALLY LOVED HER?

OUR ENGAGEMENT IS OFF, EFFECTIVE TODAY.

I WAS HOPING FOR A CHANCE TO TELL YOU OFF TODAY MYSELF,

BUT THIS WAS ALL PRETTY AMUSING, SO I'M GOOD.

GOOD-BYE.

GOODBYE, KISUKE-SAN.

GIVE IT YOUR BEST.

PAT

HEY, KISUKE-KUN!

NOW'S NOT THE TIME FOR TEARS, IS IT?

YOU'VE GOT TO GET IT TOGETHER AND GIVE A GREAT ANNOUNCE-MENT!

THAT'S ALL YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW, RIGHT?

RIGHT!

I WAS SO SHOCKED.

I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT LETTER CAUSED ALL OF THIS.

I GUESS KISUKE-SAN'S WOMANIZING WAYS WERE REALLY THE CAUSE, HUH?

BUT I DON'T THINK IT WAS ALL FOR THE WORSE.

WELL... I SUPPOSE YOU COULD SAY THAT.

KISUKE-SAN FOLLOWED HIS HEART AND LOVED THOSE WOMEN.

THAT WAS THE CAUSE OF TODAY'S CHAOS.

"DEDICATE YOURSELF TO KABUKI!"

"A MAN SHOULD LIVE HIS LIFE THE WAY HE WANTS, BUT HE MUST TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT."

MY GRANDFATHER OFTEN SAYS...

BUT TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT MAY LEAD TO HIM WORKING HARDER AT KABUKI.

TODAY'S EVENTS MAY JUST MAKE KISUKE-SAN AN EVEN BETTER ACTOR.

EVEN FACING THAT FIRING SQUAD...

KISUKE-SAN DIDN'T MAKE EXCUSES.

HE TOOK COMPLETE RESPONSI-BILITY.

YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT.

I THINK THAT KISUKE-SAN...

...REALLY AND TRULY LOVED EVERY ONE OF THEM.

AND...

BUT I WAS SURPRISED BY HIS FIANCÉE'S SUDDEN ABOUT-FACE.

SHE SEEMED LIKE SUCH A NICE PERSON...

INDEED.

Cheating's still terrible, though.

I THINK I SEE WHY REI-SAN SAID IT WAS HARD TO HATE HIM.

ACHOO!

WELL, THAT'S HOLMES-SAN FOR YOU...

I WAS RATHER WORRIED SHE WAS A BAD MATCH FOR KISUKE-SAN.

SHE STRUCK ME AS EXTREMELY PRIDEFUL.

Did she?

OH, I'M FINE.

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

WE CAN'T HAVE YOU CATCHING COLD, NOW CAN WE?

LIM, HOLMES-SAN...

I'VE... BEEN WONDERING WHAT IT WAS...

IT'S NOT THAT BIG A DEAL, BUT...

DO YOU REMEMBER AT GENKO-AN TEMPLE WHEN YOU WERE TRYING TO TELL ME SOME-THING?

AH, THAT'S RIGHT.

YES.
YOU'RE ALWAYS DOING SO MUCH FOR ME.
I THINK... I WANTED TO THANK YOU.
OH...
THANK ME?
ANYWAY, WE SHOULD HURRY.
I MADE DINNER RESERVATIONS AT AN EXCELLENT RESTAURANT.
SO THAT'S ALL IT WAS...

IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?

Oh!

NO.

OF COURSE.

I CAN'T WAIT FOR DINNER

Holmes-san would never fall for someone like me.

CHAPTER 23
END